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THE BAPTIST Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

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Expansion set for year two of GPS program

Plan emphasizes events designed to share the Gospel

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) — Following 2010's inaugural success of God's Plan for Sharing (GPS), the second year of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) program will focus on evangelism events aimed at helping Southern Baptists share the Gospel across North America in the days leading up to next Easter and beyond.

In 2010, thousands of Southern Baptists trekked door-to-door in American neighborhoods, placing door-hangers, Gospel tracts, and invitations to attend church on front doors. In 2012, GPS' "attracta! evangelism" will include block parties, wild game dinners, sports clinics, antique car shows, skate-a-thons, golf tournaments, and other events, said Thomas Hammond, NAMB evangelism team leader for the biennial GPS initiative.

GPS 2012 is aiming for churches to participate "at a high level," Hammond said. "If the local churches get behind it, we'll have a much greater level of success. Just a billboard here or there isn't enough. Churches must support it and follow up."

With a theme of, Hope: Find It Here, GPS 2012 will utilize more Internet social media like Facebook and Google Ads along with drive-time radio spots,

"If the local churches get behind it, we'll have a much greater level of success. Just a billboard here or there isn't enough. Churches must support it and follow up."

— Thomas Hammond
team leader
NAMB evangelism

See GPS on page five

MBCB OFFICERS ELECTED



Newly-elected officers of the 100-member Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, chosen to serve until the board's next organizational meeting following the 2012 annual session of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, are (from left): Joe Pate, pastor of First Church, Greenwood, vice-president; Clarence Cooper, pastor of Brandon Church, president; Rex Yancey, pastor of First Church, Ripley, secretary. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

Religious groups note 'dangerous time' in N. Korea after leader dies

WASHINGTON (BP) — "This is a dangerous time of transition" in North Korea, the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said after the death of totalitarian dictator Kim Jong Il — but the commission's Leonard Leo said, "if one refugee is protected, one prisoner freed, one church or temple opened, it is a happy day."

"The global community must be vigilant because the North Korean people remain at serious risk," Leo said. "Pyongyang [North Korea's capital] is not predictable just because Kim Jong Il is dead."

Kim, 69, died Dec. 17 after being in ill health in the last years of his 17-year rule, which was marked by a reign of terror against the North Korean people, especially Christians. Kim Jong Eun, who is reportedly in

his late 20s, will succeed his father, who has been grooming the youngest of his three sons to take over for little more than a year, according to reports.

Observers say there may be a power struggle to see who actually controls the government.

The main contact person in North Korea for Open Doors, which serves the persecuted church around the world, said it is "very unlikely that there will be any policy changes" in the wake of the dictator's death.

The Open Doors contact, named Simon, said North Korean Christians fear what the younger Kim is "capable of doing. He will do anything to keep hold of power."

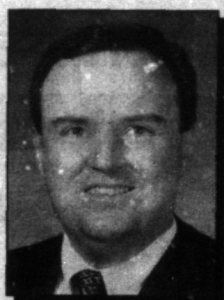
"In fact, since [Kim Jong Eun] came closer to the helm, North Korea has stepped up its attempts to uncover any religious

activities," Simon said in a Dec. 19 written release. "There have been more house raids, more spies trained to infiltrate religious and human rights networks and one South Korean Christian who was murdered in China because he helped refugees."

Carl Moeller, Open Doors' president, underscored the importance of prayer amid the uncertainty in North Korea. "We simply do not know the future of North Korea, but God does," he said.

"This is why it is vital that Christians around the world pray for North Korea during this transitional time," he said in a written release. "Pray especially for the brave Christians inside North Korea. They are fearful that they might face even more suffering. ...The people of North Korea are living a nightmare that never ends."

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The impossibility of Christmas

Ponder for a moment how implausible the Christmas Story must appear to the purely scientific mind. Who could possibly believe that a 1,000 year-old collection of 5,000 year-old verbal histories, the origins of which cannot be confirmed beyond a reasonable doubt, would foretell the coming of a Messiah and ascribe the fulfillment of that prophecy to the obscure, seemingly-illegitimate birth of a Jewish commoner in a backwater Middle East town before there was even a decent calendar?

The biologist would explain that except for the process of parthenogenesis in some lower animal and plant forms, no creature on earth ever came into existence without the sexual union of a male and female of the same species.

The geneticist would ask, since every person must receive half his deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) from his mother and half from his father, where was the Holy Spirit's DNA?

The physician would posit that a child born under such primitive, unsterile conditions probably would not survive for very long, anyway.

The historian would assert that no one is absolutely sure of what time of year — or even the year itself — that Jesus was born.

The lawyer would demand that Mary submit to a physical examination to disprove her preposterous claim to be pregnant and a virgin at the same time.

The atheist would argue that since there is no God, there could be no Son of God.

The sleep researcher would attest that since dreams are nothing more than the brain randomly misfiring during unconscious rest, Joseph's vision meant nothing.

The abortionist would say... Well, we know what the abortionist would say.

No reasonable explanation can be found in science for the impossible circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, so why should we believe the Bible account? Faith.

The righteousness of the Gospel message is grounded in faith (Rom. 1:17). We derive our faith from accepting that message (Rom. 10:17), not by what we sense in our natural world (2 Cor. 5:8).

We must cover with faith everything we hold to be true (2 Ch. 20:20). We know that with faith, nothing is impossible (Matt. 17:20, Mark 11:22).

Faith is understanding that we cannot understand everything (Heb. 11:3), and yet we must still be willing to turn control of our lives over to God (Ps. 97:10).

Faith is accepting with all your heart that God is who He says He is in His Word, that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus came into this world exactly as the Bible describes, and that Jesus is everything the Bible says He is.

There are people who live as if they believe every word of that statement, and they call themselves Christians.

As this special time of year in the Christian world, be sure to make special time to share your faith with people who don't know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Show them by word and deed the true meaning of Christmas.

During this time of seemingly endless gift giving, be sure your gifts really count for something. Give your faith to those who really need it, and give your money to the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions so every unsaved person on the globe can hear about Jesus before He comes again — and He is coming again.

Our Lord has asked us to share both our faith and our resources with a lost world. After what He did for us, it's the least we can do for Him.

From the staff of The Baptist Record, we wish for you and your family a special celebration of the birth of our Savior and a Happy New Year.



Consider that for centuries, Christians observed something called, "the Christian year," or "the Christian calendar." Followers of Jesus would structure their entire year around the various episodes of Christ's life, reflecting the themes implicit within them in different seasons of devotion. There were all sorts of special days meant to emphasize important biblical truths about God, man, and the relationship between the two.

This isn't merely some historical relic. It's an on-going practice in many parts of Christendom to this day, including my church.

Other than Christmas and Easter (and just maybe Good Friday), many Southern Baptist churches have overlooked the traditional Christian calendar. In doing so, we've not only impoverished our understanding of time as a vehicle for God's grace and a servant of His Word, we've missed out on a lot of holiday fun, too.

The first step in reengaging with the Christian calendar is to know what it is, and to that end here is a brief summary of its seasons and major holidays:

• **Advent.** The season of Advent, which covers the four Sundays preceding Christmas Day, is intended to bring Christians into an expectancy regarding the coming of

GUEST OPINION:

Celebrating the 'Christian Year'

By Eugene Curry
Grenada Hills, Ca.



Christmas. To this end, churches which observe Advent may focus on prophetic passages from the Bible.

• **Christmas.** Well, this is pretty self-explanatory — only that traditionally, while Christmas begins on Dec. 25, it also includes the next 11 days in its focus on the birth of Jesus. (Remember the song, The Twelve Days of Christmas?) This extended period is sometimes called "Christmastide."

• **Epiphany.** This is one of the traditional holidays/seasons with which Southern Baptists may be less familiar. Epiphany is from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, which means manifestation. During Epiphany, which falls on Jan. 6, Christians reflect upon Jesus' manifestation before the public, sometimes with an emphasis on the visit of the Magi from the East.

After Jan. 6, this thematic focus is maintained for a while, giving Christians a chance to reflect on the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and His rise to prominence — an arc that climaxes on Transfiguration Sunday.

• **Lent.** Lent gets its name from the old English word for spring. During this time, the 40 days preceding Easter, Christians reflect on the growing opposition to Jesus during His ministry. His own personal self-abnegation, and finally His self-sacrifice which culminated on the Cross — an event commemorated on Good Friday.

Lent is a chance, then, not just to remember some of the most important episodes in Christ's life, but also to ask ourselves how we might sacrifice to the glory of God and the furtherance of His Kingdom.

• **Easter.** This is another of those days that we already know and love but just as with Christmas, Easter Sunday was just the tip of the iceberg, traditionally speaking. The season of Easter lasts for another 49 days after that. That's a full 50 days to celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death.

• **Pentecost.** Pentecost marks the close of the main, tightly-packed sequence of observances in the Christian calendar. It's a day that closes out the Easter season and marks the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the fledgling church in Jerusalem.

As such, it's a chance for us to consider all that God has given us to enable us to live the Christian life. It's also a chance for us to remember just how awesome a responsibility rests on our shoulders: being Jesus' witnesses throughout the world.

It's my hope that many of you will join with me in re-digging these old wells, embracing a calendar that doesn't honor just fathers, mothers, veterans, and Presidents (as worthy as these things are in their own right), but which also recognizes and celebrates the fully-orbed life that Jesus lived for your salvation and mine.

Curry is pastor of First Church, Grenada Hills, Ca.

Research uncovers trail of Bible's history

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) — The potential contribution to Dead Sea Scroll scholarship of nine scroll fragments owned by Southwestern Seminary (SWTBS) was underscored when several SWBTS professors discussed their research to date during the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) 2011 meeting in San Francisco.

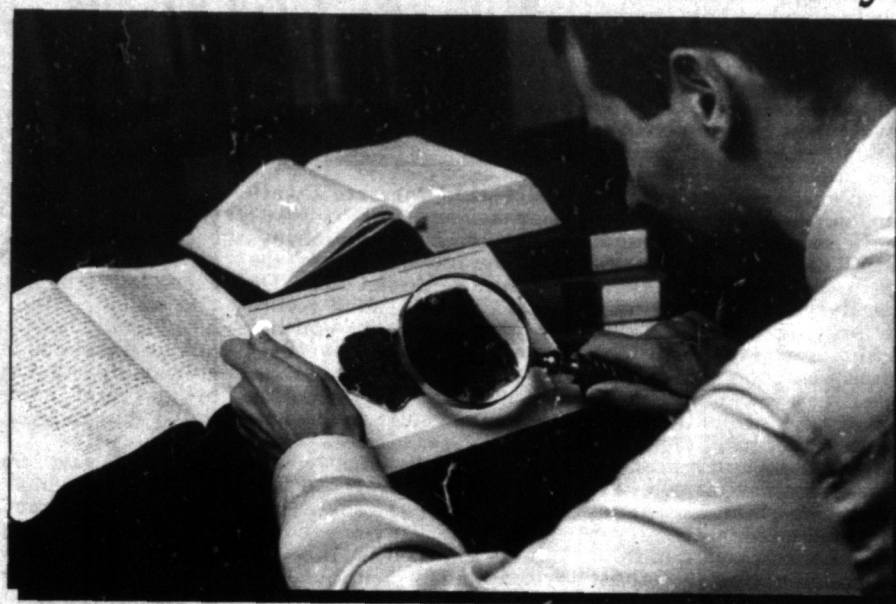
"Southwestern's scrolls contain readings of Old Testament passages that are nowhere else attested," Ryan Stokes, assistant professor of Old Testament, noted after the SBL's three-day mid-November meeting. "We are just beginning to comprehend their importance for the field, but we expect them to shed light on how we came to have the Old Testament text that we have today."

Southwestern Seminary currently houses the largest collection of fragments owned by an institution of higher education within the United States. The seminary will host an exclusive exhibit of the scrolls from July 2, 2012, to Jan. 11, 2013. To learn more about Southwestern Seminary's exclusive Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible exhibit, visit <http://seethescrolls.com>.

At the SBL meeting, Southwestern professors introduced the scroll fragments to the academic community, demonstrating the seminary's commitment to contribute to the field of biblical scholarship.

Steven Ortiz, associate professor of archaeology and biblical backgrounds and director of Southwestern's Tandy Institute for Archaeology, introduced the session focusing on the scroll fragments.

In addition to Stokes, Southwestern faculty members who presented research were George Klein, professor of Old Testament; Eric Mitchell, associate professor of Old Testament and archaeology;



RESEARCH PROCEEDING — Ryan Stokes, assistant professor of Old Testament at Southwestern Seminary, shown here examining one of the seminary's nine Dead Sea Scroll fragments, was part of a team of SWBTS scholars presenting their research at the Society of Biblical Literature's mid-November meeting in San Francisco. (BP photo)

Ishwaran Mudliar and Joshua Williams, assistant professors of Old Testament.

Ortiz said scholars at SBL noted the potential contribution that Southwestern's scroll fragments have for Dead Sea Scroll scholarship. "The accumulation of data and how it was presented showed that these were some important fragments," Ortiz said.

Southwestern's professors displayed an

in-depth knowledge of the particular fragments they researched, Ortiz said, as well as setting forth the implications the fragments have for a broader field of research.

"With the initial announcement of Southwestern's acquisition [in January 2010], all the emphasis was placed on the purchase of the scrolls," Ortiz said. "So that is the only thing that people knew about Southwestern's Dead Sea Scroll fragments."

Former Planned Parenthood employees to aid inquiry

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — Seven former Planned Parenthood employees have volunteered to assist in the congressional investigation of the country's largest abortion provider.

The one-time workers for affiliates of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) told leaders of the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee they would testify to illegal or unethical behavior by the abortion giant's employees or clinics.

They commended the committee's examination of PPFA, which was announced in September by the subcommittee on oversight and investigations, and said the probe "is long overdue."

PPFA "has operated as a law unto itself, gladly accepting tens of millions of dollars in taxpayer support while using the rubric of 'reproductive rights' to claim exemption from the normal standards of accountability that every other recipient of public funds is expected to meet," the former employees wrote in a Dec. 7 letter.

Planned Parenthood and its affiliates received more than \$363 million in government

grants and contracts from federal, state, and local sources in 2008-09. While Planned Parenthood's affiliates provide contraceptives and some health care services, their performance and advocacy of abortion is a well-recognized part of their work.

Planned Parenthood's number of abortions and share of the abortion market has increased as government funding has increased over the years. Planned Parenthood's affiliates performed more than 332,000 abortions in 2009.

While Planned Parenthood's annual abortion totals have grown, the number of abortions in the United States has decreased by about one-fourth since 1990. Planned Parenthood signaled last year its apparent intention to continue to increase its abortion business when it issued a requirement that each of its affiliates have at least one clinic performing the procedure by 2013.

Though the law bars federal family planning funds from being used for abortions, the employees said, "We can state categorically, from personal experience, that abortion is indeed deployed as a means of family planning according to the mission of Planned Parenthood."

They cited these among the incidents they have observed in which a PPFA affiliate or employee failed to:

• "Properly account for and maintain separation between government funds prohibited from use for elective abortions and those funds derived from other sources that are not subject to such limitations;

• "Notify parents when a vulnerable girl is seeking an abortion, including instances when the minor girl is the victim of an act of statutory rape under applicable state law;

• "Detect and act upon instances where a girl or woman was brought to the clinic under some degree of coercion, up to and including instances where the girl or woman was subjected to human trafficking and was a victim of crime."

They said, "[W]e are of one mind that the extent of these problems with the organization is not fully understood by the American people, who are underwriting the growth of Planned Parenthood and its potent outreach to the young and the poor."

Looking back

10 years ago

The New York Times spotlights the work of Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers in the aftermath of the attacks on 9/11. Over 1,000 volunteers have helped clean out dust and other debris from apartments adjacent to the former site of the World Trade Center.

20 years ago

Southern Baptists are advised by the convention's Home Mission Board in Atlanta that they can expect their fourth consecutive year of increased baptisms in 1982, for the first time since the 1947-50 era of growth in baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention.

50 years ago

The Mississippi Baptist Convention observes a significant occasion on December 24. On that date, the convention will be exactly 125 years of age. The "Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi" was constituted in 1836 in Washington, Adams County.



THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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YOU CAN RESPOND
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Simply share the following prayer
with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

BIBLIOPHER

By Charles Marx, 1932 - 2004
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HKLUXK SE LGIK.
NUYKG YKBKT: ZCU

Clue: T = N

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Daniel Five: Five

DO NOT STOP PRAYING

Recently at an association meeting I was speaking to a lady who had her *Covering Mississippi in Prayer* pin on her collar. She pointed at the pin and with a kind of mischievous grin she said, "Now this is soon going to be over isn't it?" I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "I mean at the end of 2011, we can stop." I laughed and said, "No Mam you cannot stop! This goes on until death do us part." I know that she was going to continue praying day after day before we ever had the emphasis on *Covering Mississippi in Prayer* and she will continue all of her days. On the other hand, there are people who committed to pray every day for self, servants, and souls and somewhat looked upon the prayer emphasis as a program from the Mississippi Baptist Convention that will conclude at the end of December and then we will move on to something else. Wrong — wrong — wrong! Thousands and thousands of you joined in *Covering Mississippi in Prayer* and beginning each day before the Lord in prayer. All year long it has been a growing prayer experience. The impact of our praying has been felt in multiple ways throughout our state and even our country.

Prayer is an amazing thing. I can fairly and safely say that no great spiritual aspect of your life will take place apart from prayer whether it is receiving Jesus as your Savior and Lord or seeking God's direction about some weighty decision. Prayer must be involved. Whether it is trying to find a job, deciding to marry a mate, entrusting your children to the hand of God, or seeking God's grace in a difficult or awkward setting, prayer is the essential in finding the Lord at work in your experience.

So do not stop praying! Whatever else you may stop doing do not stop praying.

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Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Jesus said, "Men are always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). We are always to pray and not fall by the wayside — do not stop. Do what God has called you to do. My prayer for you has been that this last year of prayer experiences have become so real, your faith has grown, and your experiences of God's hand at work through prayer have been so genuine that you do not want to stop. You must not stop. How can you keep up a prayer life consistently and triumphantly without just wearing out, wearing down, or wearing off?

One — start with prayer. Before you do anything else start your day with prayer. Before you make some phone calls, turn on the television, go for a run, or start mapping out the burdens, opportunities, and responsibilities of the day, start with prayer. Through the year a number of people have said to me something like, "do we have to do this every day?" When they would say that a couple of things would come to my mind. The first one being — have you not been praying every day and the other thing was why would you not do something as meaningful and fulfilling as praying every day. Aren't there things in your routine that you repeat over and over and yet they have

meaning and they enrich your life? Sure! Don't you eat, breathe, and sleep every day? You may drink coffee every day. I can hear some of you saying, "Well, I cannot do without that." You may talk on the phone, drive, and go walking, every day. Even beyond and above all of those things, you need to pray daily.

Two — say! One of the things that has blessed, encouraged, and enriched my life to say nothing about the fact that it has been a part of the mix in my life is to pray every day. Most of those things come naturally and almost thoughtlessly because you need to do them. One of the things that I did over a year ago to keep me focused on praying every day is that I started writing a letter to God each morning. I actually have been doing it for over a year, but I will continue for as long as God gives me breath. Regardless of what is going on in the early part of my day, I pause to write God a letter. Sometimes they are longer

and at other times they are shorter and more thought provoking. It has simply become a priority and an important part of my life. Something as simple as writing a brief letter has marked my way and kept me on track each day all year long. Write down one, two, or three sentences in a letter to God. If you keep a notebook and day by day write a letter to God, you will be amazed as it causes you to stop and think what you would like to say to Him. It also reminds you that each day you need to meet with Him.

As you look at the year ahead, let me give you a third thing that will assist you in your daily praying — stretch. If you have grown in your spiritual life and in your prayer life with God, I can assure you that He is not finished. He has more for you and will lead you into avenues of understanding in your walk with Him and talk with Him. As you look back, you will never believe how far you have come. Allow God to stretch you, pull you, push you, and enlarge you as you see and experience new areas of God at work in your life that you never knew existed. If you have started the development process of a stronger and more effective prayer life, do not stop praying now.

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Futral and May

1. Jim Futral recently presented Christine May from Pine Forest Church, Montgomery Association, with a letter of appreciation for her creative way of making extra money to give to international missions. Every year she makes cakes and rolls to sell and gives the proceeds to the Lottie Moon Offering.

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COLLEGE NEWS

1. William Carey University inducted 66 new members into the Mississippi Beta Chapter of Alpha Chi National College Honor Society on November 30 in the Kresge Room of Thomas Business Building on WCU's Hattiesburg campus. Membership into Alpha Chi is limited to no more than 10 percent of the junior, senior, and graduate classes, and at WCU, students must have at least a 3.70 Grade Point Average on the 4.0

scale to qualify. The ceremony was led by Randall Harris, associate professor of biology and Alpha Chi advisor, Read Diket, professor of art and education, director of Center for Creative Scholars, and Alpha Chi advisor, Bennie Crockett, vice president for institutional effectiveness and long range planning and co-director for the Carey Center, and Cheryl Maqueda, assistant professor of Spanish. Shown are the inductees.



1. WCU Alpha Chi inductees

STAFF CHANGES

1. Wesson Church, Wesson, has called as its new pastor, Nelson Santa Ana, formerly Associate Pastor at Galilee Baptist Church, Zachary, La. He is a graduate of Louisiana State University and the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Joining Nelson in his new ministry is his wife, Carly, son Carson and daughter Caroline. Pictured are: Dale Sullivan, Santa Ana, and Lori Bridges.



1. Sullivan, Santa Ana, and Bridges

GPS

but less TV advertising. Some TV ads will still run in dozens of markets across the United States. A half-dozen 30-second TV spots in English and Spanish already have been produced.

The external GPS website, Findthere.com, will include personal testimonies, Gospel presentations, tips on how to find a Southern Baptist Convention church, and answers to spiritual questions. An internal GPS website, GPS2020.net, will offer tips to pastors and church members. A toll-free phone number will also be available: (888) 537-8720.

In total, NAMB will make more than one million dollars available for GPS 2012 for media buys — roughly \$18,000 - \$20,000 per state convention, Hammond said. The mission board is budgeting an overall \$15 million for GPS campaigns every two years through 2020.

NAMB President Kevin Ezell said GPS 2012 will have his 100% support and commitment of financial and personnel resources, as well as the same commitment from NAMB staff and trustees.

Affirming GPS as dovetailing with NAMB's new Send North America evangelistic church planting strategy, Ezell said, "GPS will incorporate our church planting focus in at least two ways. State conventions, associations, and local churches can use GPS to go into an area that needs a church and use it to sow seeds for a new church plant to come.

"Second, GPS will be a great tool for existing church plants to use to evangelize their communities."

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1. Neshoba Church, Union



2. Sunrise Church, Leake



3. Taylor recognition



4. East Columbia Church, Columbia

1. Neshoba Church, Union, held a baby dedication. Shown are Lee, Jill, Sydnee, and Peyton Killen and pastor Johnny Collins.

2. Sunrise Church, Leake, held an RA recognition in September. Shown are the RAs and leaders.

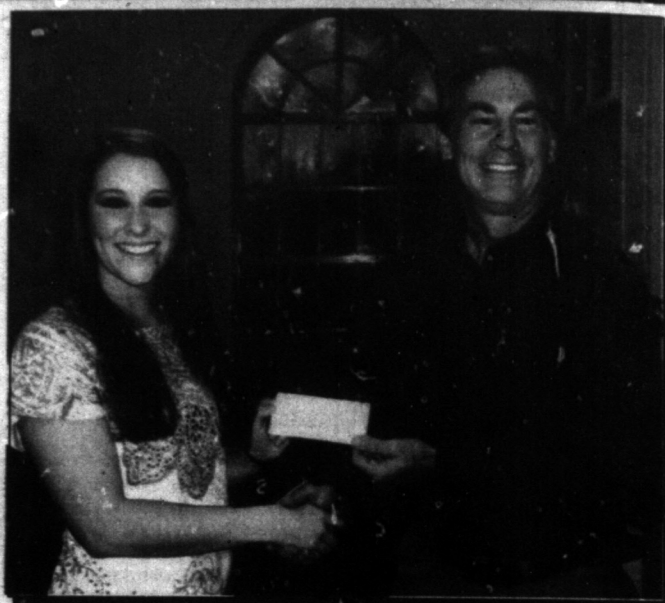
3. The Church Music Department, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, presented a certificate to Bernard M. Taylor for 50 years of service as minister of music at Carrollton Church, Carrollton. Shown are Taylor, his wife, Beverly, Paula Smith, and Gene Henderson.

4. East Columbia Church, Columbia, recently ordained Geoffrey McMichael and Jerry Broom as deacons. Shown are Christi McMichael, McMichael, Caitlin McMichael, Broom, Belinda Broom, and pastor Tim Morrison.

5. Priscilla Hogan, a member of Dixie Church, Hattiesburg, organized and held a golf tournament for her senior project at school. She used the proceeds to go toward the mission efforts of the church's Peru mission team. She presented Paul Wise, mission team organizer, a check for \$4000. Shown are Hogan and Wise.



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5. Dixie Church, Hattiesburg

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LifeWay Research: SBC favorable rating clouded by negatives

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — The majority of Americans have a favorable impression of Southern Baptists, according to a recent LifeWay Research study.

However, 40% of respondents have an unfavorable view of the denomination with more than a third strongly assuming a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) church is not for them. The negativity is higher among the unchurched.

The LifeWay Research study was conducted in September 2011 after Bryant Wright, president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of Johnson Ferry Church in suburban Atlanta, appointed a task force to consider a possible name change for the 166 year-old convention.

The study indicates a segment of Americans have unfavorable opinions of Southern Baptists in comparison to other faith groups. However, with 53% being favorable toward Southern Baptists (including 15% very favorable), both sides need to be considered, said Ed Stetzer, vice president of research and ministry development at LifeWay Christian Resources.

"On one hand it does look like the SBC has higher negatives than other faith groups, and the unchurched numbers are particularly disconcerting," Stetzer said, "but on the other, most people don't seem to be concerned either way because there is a level of indifference to denominations or religion in general."

In fact, two-thirds of Americans are without strong feelings in regard to all the Christian faith groups included in the survey, with a third or less either very favorable or

very unfavorable to them.

Respondents were shown the names of five denominations or faith groups and asked to "indicate if your impression is very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or you are not familiar enough to form an opinion." The study indicates 62% of Americans have a favorable view of Methodists compared to 59% for Catholics, 53% for Southern Baptists, 37% for Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and 28% for Muslims.

The study sought to determine how the name might impact the interest or connection with a congregation. When asked their level of agreement with the statement, "When I see (fill in denominational affiliation) in the name of a church, I assume it is not for me," 35% strongly agree a Southern Baptist church is not for them — higher than for Catholics (33%), other Baptists (29%), Methodists (26%) and community or nondenominational churches (20%).

Significantly more respondents (58%) disagree with this statement for community or nondenominational churches, indicating that such churches are considered as a possible fit more often than other Christian faith groups included in the survey. When considering Baptists (not specifically SBC), 44% disagree with the statement; Catholics, 43%; Methodists, 42%; and Southern Baptists, 38%.

This positive reaction to community or nondenominational churches reflects other recent LifeWay Research analysis that showed growth among nondenominational churches while Southern Baptists are trending in a membership decline.



1. Enterprise Church, Enterprise

1. The GAs from Enterprise Church, Enterprise, Clarke County, went on a caroling hayride to deliver fruit baskets to local shut-ins. Shown are the participants.

2. First Church, Runnelstown, will host The Singing Echoes in concert Jan. 6, 7 p.m. A love offering will be received.

3. The Joy in Faith Sunday School class of Carriage Hills Church, Southaven, are shown during their fall planning meeting. The class ranges in age from 70 - 101. The oldest active member is Anita Sutterfield, 91, third row, third from left.

4. The children of Belden Church, Belden, performed their Christmas Musical December 11. Teresa Bridges, Director of Children's Ministry; Jim Holcomb, pastor.

5. The children and leaders of Concord Church, Benton-Tippah Association, enjoyed a trip to the pumpkin patch at Blue Mountain in October. Shown are the participants.

6. Sylvarena Church, Smith Association, ordained Gird Norman Warren III as deacon on Dec. 4. Shown are pastor George Stockman, Rhonda Warren, Warren, and Robin Risher.



3. Carriage Hills Church, Southaven



4. Belden Church, Belden



5. Concord Church, Benton-Tippah Association



6. Warren ordination

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Commission can move forward

Congress finally reauthorizes religious freedom committee

WASHINGTON (BP) — The United States' watchdog for worldwide religious freedom gained reauthorization from Congress Friday on what could have been its final day of existence.

The House of Representatives approved by voice vote a bill to reauthorize the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for three more years. The House action came three days after the Senate approved the same legislation Dec. 13 by unanimous consent.

The good news for religious liberty advocates did not come without some disappointments for many of their number. The bill limits commissioners to two, two-year terms. That restriction will require seven of the nine current commissioners to leave the panel in 90 days. In addition, USCIRF's yearly budget will drop from more than \$4 million to \$3 million.

Richard Land, one of USCIRF's commissioners and a Southern Baptist religious freedom advocate, said he was "delighted and relieved" that Congress had reauthorized the panel.

USCIRF's closure "would have been tragic for the cause of religious freedom and human rights around the world," said Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville. "USCIRF has been so successful in highlighting these issues that other countries have imitated the United States and started similar commissions of their own. How ironic would it have been for the

United States to allow its commission to lapse?

"My only regret is the legislation does not allow for at least one or two of the current commissioners who have years of experience to continue to serve for at least one more term to provide institutional memory to the commission," he said.

In a written statement, Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., did not criticize the term-limit measure added to the House bill he sponsored. Instead, he applauded Congress' reauthorization of a panel whose work he described as "of the utmost importance."

USCIRF "speaks plainly about religious freedom abuses wherever they occur in ways that the State Department can rarely muster, during Republican and Democrat administrations alike," Wolf said in a written statement. "[T]oday's reauthorization sends a clear message to repressive regimes around the globe that international religious freedom is a U.S. foreign policy priority."

Land, who has served on USCIRF for more than a decade minus a nearly one-year absence, is one of the seven commissioners who will have to leave the panel within 90 days.

"The commission's survival is far more important than my service," Land said. "The continuation of institutional memory is more important than my personal service. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve, and I know others will be similarly blessed by their terms of service in the future."

USCIRF has played a major role in bringing attention to the persecution of Christians and other religious practitioners since it was established by the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998. The bipartisan panel advises the White House, U.S. State Department,



Richard Land

and Congress on the status of religious freedom overseas.

Among its responsibilities is to make a yearly report on global conditions for religious adherents and to recommend to the State Department governments that it believes qualify as "countries of particular concern," a designation reserved for the world's worst violators of religious liberty.

The House voted 391-21 in mid-September for Wolf's bill reauthorizing USCIRF for two more years, but the bill met a roadblock in the Senate. Using one of the chamber's rules, a single senator reportedly put a hold on the reauthorization legislation.

Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., was widely reported to be the member who held up the bill.

Music school opens for Mississippi enrollment

January begins the third of eight courses offered at seven locations in Mississippi sponsored by the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), in cooperation with the Providence Learning Center of New Orleans Seminary.

The courses are designed to provide basic training for bivocational music directors and other music leaders in churches. The eight courses meet two hours per week.

Each course is eight weeks in length. The third course, Reading Music: Rhythm/Pitch, will meet once a week for two hours for eight consecutive weeks (Starkville location meets on Saturday) at the following locations and times:

- First Church, Lyman — beginning January 17 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). Louis White, teacher: (228) 832-2159.

- Northcrest Church, Meridian — beginning January 16 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). Buddy McElroy, teacher: (601) 938-8668.

- First Church, Cleveland — beginning January 17 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). Alan Berry, teacher: (662) 843-2701.

- Easthaven Church, Brookhaven — beginning January 16 (7-9 p.m.). Mark Hamilton, teacher: (601) 835-6607.

- First Church, Starkville — January 14 (9 a.m.-5 p.m., with lunch break). Tom Jenkins, teacher: (662) 323-5633.

- First Church, Booneville — beginning January 17 (6:30-8:30 p.m.). LuAnne Ford, teacher: (662) 728-6272.

- Broadmoor Church, Madison — beginning January 16 (6-8 p.m.). Jimmy McCaleb, teacher: (601) 924-1233.

The cycle of courses is scheduled over a two-year period. The eight courses are Song Leading; Worship Planning; Reading Music: Rhythm/Pitch; Reading Music: Harmony/Melody; Hymnology; Music Administration/Staff Relations; Survey of Church Music Resources; and Class Voice.

Each course is independent and has no prerequisite. Six students must be enrolled for each class to start. Each student who completes the eight courses earns a certificate from the Providence Learning Center of New Orleans Seminary. There is a one-time enrollment fee of \$25.00. The cost of each course is \$125.00.

A \$60.00 scholarship is available for all first-time students. Students already enrolled are not eligible. The grant is limited to one person per church.

For more information, contact the teachers listed above or Jimmy McCaleb at MBCB Church Music Department, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3273 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 273. E-mail: mcaleb@cabinview.net. Web site: <http://mbcb.org/church/growth/cm/school.aspx>.

THE VILLAGE VIEW



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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

NOVEMBER 1, 2011
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DECEMBER 5, 2011

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Church security: Plans must assess risk

By Chester L. Quarles
Correspondent

Fourth in a seven-part,
aperiodical series

Before you can develop a strong church security plan, you must complete a risk assessment. Your local police department's crime prevention unit can be of service here. They can tell you of crimes in your neighborhood and crimes against other churches in their jurisdiction. Knowledge is your first line of defense!

The word, "risk," implies any possibility of loss or attack. To a novice, it seems a vague and elusive term. Risk assessment is usually historical. We need to know what has gone before. We need to know if an incident at another church could happen at our church, then we can make a list of the threats and weaknesses which most concern our membership.

We can look at crime trends and then rate our information by assigning a reliability factor to it. The police crime prevention unit can help prioritize your risks.

Risk avoidance attempts to remove or decrease exposure. Occurrence reduction attempts to reduce the activities through which a threat might be accomplished. Risk acceptance is what most churches do now — nothing! It basically relies on the myth that there is very little that you can do to prevent or deter crime.

Risk spreading involves assigning functions to multiple individuals so that the loss impact is reduced. An example of this would be using the "2+ Rule" (two or more people together reduce the threat of street crime by 67%). For example, if two or more people take the offering to the

bank, the risk is spread. Risk transfer usually involves the insurance industry or sharing the loss with another party, such as an armored car service, thus minimizing loss.

The risk assessment is an absolutely necessary component of any viable security plan. Risk management is a moral and a legal responsibility. It should be noted, however, that security analyses, policies, plans and procedures may be subpoenaed in the event of a premises liability lawsuit.

While the total lack of security planning is a strong negative issue, the problem of failing to live up to your own policies, procedures, and plans will certainly be exploited by opposing legal counsel in a lawsuit.

Vulnerability indices involve identifying specific threats. What are the primary threats? Vandalism, burglary, arson, robbery, internal fraud, and kidnapping are people-caused threats. Earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and fires

should also be considered in your risk factors.

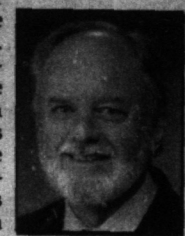
Probability factors are significant. Are you situated in a high-crime or a low-crime area? Are members of your congregation reasonably concerned about threat, loss, or risk? Have there been any specific threats against your facility, your congregation, or your church leaders?

Criticality refers to the consequence of a particular risk. If your church treasurer steals the building fund, then you aren't going to build that addition. If a non-custodial parent takes a child out of your nursery, then many worshippers won't leave their children in your nurseries.

Risk assessments can help you manage your risks realistically.

Quarles is professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and co-author of the book, *Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship*. He may be contacted at cquarles@olemiss.edu. Copyright 2011. Used by permission.

Quarles



BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Rejoice in God's Gift

Luke 2:1-20

By Burn Page

Christmas has always been my favorite time of the year. I grew up on a farm where our family worked very hard on many very long days. However, on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we got a brief reprieve. Cattle had to be fed but for the most part hard labor was suspended so our family could celebrate Christmas. Christmas was a special time of the year because for me it was a season of grace; I didn't feel like I had to work to earn anything — including the gifts I received!

And speaking of gifts, two and a half years after Annice and I got married, God gave us a gift — our firstborn son, Justin, who was born on December 25, 1978. When the nurses brought our new baby to his mother, they brought him in a Christmas stocking. He was and is still a source of

great joy for both of us.

Luke's story is a story of "great joy." Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem (Joseph's hometown) to register for the census. The account of the birth in Bethlehem clearly demonstrates that Jesus is David's legitimate offspring and the promised Davidic Messiah (cf. Micah 5:2). In God's providence Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when Jesus, David's greatest son, was born. The birthplace of the king who first united Israel now births the king who offers unity to the world (Butler).

While they were there the time came for the baby to be born — an echo of Gen. 25:24 — When the time came for her [Rebekah] to give birth. As was the custom, Mary wrapped her baby in strips of cloth (literally, swaddled him), a normal method of child care



Page

of the times that sought to keep the limbs of the child straight.

The scene shifts to nearby fields where an angelic host announced the birth of a "savior" to shepherds watching their flocks. The word "shine around" is used only one other time in the New Testament

and that by Paul in Acts 26:13 when he described the "light from heaven, brighter than the sun." Shepherds, unlike during the time of David, were perceived to be dishonest and unclean by the standards of ceremonial law. They represent the outcasts and sinners for whom Jesus came and were the first recipients of the good news that was to be for all people.

While Luke envisioned the gospel as being for all people, including the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-29; 18:10), here, as in 3:21; 7:29; 8:47, the people of Israel were primarily in Luke's mind. The singular "people" refers everywhere else in Luke to the people of Israel. The

good news is that a savior has been born. Here for the first and only time in the Gospel is "savior" used for Jesus.

Since Luke was aware of Jesus' brothers and sisters (Luke 8:19-21; Acts 1:14; cf. Mark 6:3) he described Mary's baby as her protokos ("first-born") instead of monogenes (only begotten) because he knew of other sons. This "firstborn" is also "Savior." But this savior is more than the term meant when applied to the judges of Israel. He is Christ the Lord, Christos Kurios. Whereas John the Baptist was the prophet of the Most High (1:16, 17, 76; 7:26), Jesus is Savior, Christ, and Lord. Jesus' physical birth was like any other birth. It is the origin (1:35), identity (2:11), and destiny (1:32-33) of the child that are significant.

The angel announced "good news of great joy," a phrase that translates the Greek verb euangelizo which means to preach the good news. The noun form (euangelion) is translated "gospel." The verb is found eleven times in the Gospels, and ten

of these are found in Luke. The good news was news of peace — a peace that passes all understanding (cf. Phil. 4:7). It was not the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome) for the absence of war doesn't guarantee the presence of peace. This peace is the OT shalom. It is not simply an inner disposition or the absence of war. The word evokes a whole social order of well-being and prosperity, security and harmony. In a season where so many people suffer from depression, grief, and loneliness, this message is indeed good news!

These faithful shepherds heard-went-saw-and-told everyone about the message, and all who heard it were amazed. May the Lord renew in you this Christmas the amazement of his gift of salvation, great joy, and perfect peace!

Page is chair of the Department of Christian Studies and Philosophy at Mississippi College and a member of First Church, Clinton.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

The Messiah Has Come

Numbers 24: 17; Matthew 1:16-21; 2: 7-11

By Melleen Moore

How refreshing — The Messiah has come — a reminder for this joyous season of the year. Could we ever celebrate enough to welcome the Messiah? Sure we can. All He asked is to be invited into our hearts. Having been raised on a farm we spent many hours outside. One of my favorite memories of the late evening work in this season was to gaze into the sky and choose 'the star.' Could it be this one or could it be this one? The reason for 'the star' was to show the way to the Messiah and so we celebrate His coming again and again.

Messiah's Coming:
Foretold by Prophets
Numbers 24:17;
Matthew 1:16-17

The prophecy of the Messiah was foretold in

God's divine providence. There are several prophecies of the Messiah's coming in the Old Testament. In Numbers the Israelites make their way towards the Promised Land. Their reputation precedes them after the miraculous deliverance from Egypt. The inhabitants of Moab, a narrow strip of land east of the Dead Sea, are anxious. The King of Moab, Balak, hired a fortune teller to curse the Israelites. He tried, but each time it turned into a blessing so Balak became a reluctant non-Jewish prophet. In his words, "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near." (Numbers 24:17, NKJV) The future event proclaims an Israelite from the line of Jacob as a star (king) with a scepter. This king would have power over Moab and the Shethites. In Matthew we see the fulfillment of the



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Abraham until the Messiah that was foretold by the prophets.

Messiah's Mission: To Save us From Sin
Matthew 1:18-21.

Matthew introduces the Messiah as "Jesus Christ" (Matthew 1:18 NKJV). The name Jesus is the personal name meaning "Savior" and the name Christ means 'anointed one.' Mary was an honorable and moral woman engaged to Joseph. Being engaged was a legal agreement which required a divorce to dissolve it. Mary was chosen by God to birth His son; therefore, she became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph also was an honorable

and upright man of compassion and kindness. Upon learning of the pregnancy, he desired to secretly divorce Mary. However, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream declaring the conception by the Holy Spirit and encouraging him to take Mary as his wife. The explanation gave details of the baby to come as a boy to be named Jesus who was to save his people from sin. Joseph took Mary as his wife as the angel of the Lord revealed.

Messiah's Rule:
He's Worthy of Worship
Matthew 2:1, 7-11

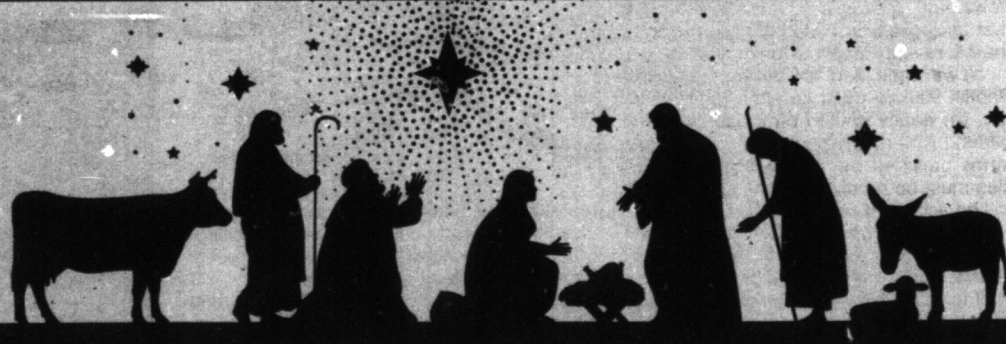
Here is 'the star' that led the wise men to visit (Matthew 2: 2-9) Jesus in Bethlehem. The wise men were from the east possibly Persia, Babylon or the Arabian Desert where they may have had some Jewish influence. Being counselors of Kings, they were learned men thought to have studied astrology. They came unexpectedly as much as two years after Jesus' birth. The scripture notes that the wise men entered a house, not a stable, and Jesus is referred to as a

young child, not a baby. Herod the Great was the reigning King. He is described as being ruthless and violent, doing anything to protect his power. Herod inquired of the wise men the time of the star's appearance which would later lead to his order to kill all male children two years and under in Bethlehem and its districts. The wise men answered the king's question of where with a prophecy from Micah 5:2 stating Bethlehem. After the visit with the King, they were overjoyed to see 'the star' guiding them to the place where the child was. This is the first indication that 'the star' actually moved. There are assumed to be three wise men since there were three gifts opened and presented — gold, frankincense and myrrh. They fell on their knees and worshiped Him. Yes, the Messiah has come and yes, the Messiah is worthy of worship. He is the gift to redeem us from sin. Will we accept and open the greatest gift of all?

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

Merry Christmas

from the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board



BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Thriving in a Fast-Food Culture

Proverbs 23:20-21; Daniel 1:8, 11-16; Romans 13:12-14

By Burn Page

The American culture is obsessed with sex and sensuality. In a culture that simultaneously abuses the body and worships it, this lesson affirms that being good stewards of our bodies means that we don't malign our bodies; rather, we align them with Christ.

Shakespeare's character in Henry IV, John Falstaff, is a drunkard, a thief, a liar, and a coward. He is well loved by audiences though, because he is humorous, jovial, and free-living. However, he is eventually rejected (in the play) because his behavior becomes so reprehensible. Unfortunately, in America today, rather than rejecting and condemning sensuous behavior, society's trend seems to be one of accepting and embracing lifestyles that are obnoxious, immoral, and perverted.

In Proverbs 23:19-21, a son is considered to be wise who listens to his father's instruction and desires the right path (proper conduct) for his life. One way to stay on the right path is to avoid drunkenness and gluttony, both of which cause one to be drowsy, which leads to laziness and then to poverty.

The wise writer warned against drunkenness AND gluttony, but most Baptists I know (like me who loves covered dish luncheons and "dinner on the ground") condemn the former and wink at the latter. The second clause in verse 19, keep your heart on the right path, is literally "make your heart walk" (= guide your heart) in the way (the path of wisdom). Do not join (don't be a part of) those who drink too much wine (excessive drinkers) or gorge themselves on meat



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(excessive eaters). The scriptures teach that Daniel resolved or determined that he would not defile himself with the food and wine from the king's table (Dan. 1:8).

In Romans 13:12-14, Paul wrote from the perspective of the closing period of this present age and stated that "the hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." He too called for godly living (cf. also James 5:8-9; 2 Peter 3:11-14). So we are to "wake up to reality" (Philips). Every day brings us closer to the return of Christ, so let us take action. Since the night is nearly over and the day is about to dawn (v. 12), it is critical that believers rid themselves completely of the works of darkness and clothe themselves with the weapons of light.

The conduct of darkness is described as "orgies," "drunkenness," "spiritual immorality and debauchery." The HCSB offers the translation "not in carousing

and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity." In the gospel according to John, we learn that people prefer darkness to light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Darkness hides and conceals while light discloses and reveals. Evil flourishes in darkness because those who practice evil wrongly assume that what they are doing cannot be seen. The desire for darkness is itself an admission of the wrongness of the act.

Instead of flirting with or engaging in such activity, believers are to put on ("clothe oneself with") the armor of Jesus Christ. Joshua demanded, "But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." (Josh. 24:15) From Joshua to Paul, the message was and is: Stop dilly dalling around when it comes to which god you will serve — choose either the gods of darkness or the God of light. Be decisive in your actions! Separate yourselves from all that belongs to darkness. Jesus Christ is our armor against wickedness. When we walk (live) "in

him" who is light, we experience the victory over darkness — for a whole world of darkness cannot extinguish one tiny light (cf. Jn. 1:5).

So take off the old clothing (of disobedience) and clothe yourself with Christ (through obedience). Don't malign your bodies; align them with Christ. Automobile tires out of alignment are subjected to excessive wear; a life out of alignment with Christ is no different. While Christians continue to be tempted with acts of darkness, those who live in Christ will not allow those temptations the opportunity of expression in their lives. Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature, lit., "and do not make forethought [pronoiā] for the flesh [sarkos]." Do not even permit the possibility of allowing them to fulfill their evil intentions in your life!

Page is chair of the Department of Christian Studies and Philosophy at Mississippi College and a member of First Church, Clinton.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Stay Grateful For God's Care

Numbers 22:4b-6, 31-35; 23:19-23

By Melleen Moore

The Israelites had spent nearly 40 years in the wilderness and were preparing to enter into Canaan. There had been numerous oppositions along the way from disobedience, to lack of faith and rebelling against God's chosen leaders. The children of Israel had truly become a nation under Moses' and Aaron's leadership. God had established laws, developed worship practices and sacrifices as well as made military preparation. Victories had been won in battle and the Children of Israel were being recognized as God's people in a covenant relationship with the Lord.

Some Will Oppose God's People
Numbers 22:4b-6
The Israelites had camped near the territory of Moab on

the east side of the Dead Sea. The inhabitants of Moab were frightened for several reasons — large population of Israelites, possibility of defeat in battle, and losing the known way of life of the Moabites. Balak, King of Moab, had sent messengers seeking the assistance of Balaam, a sorcerer or pagan diviner to place a curse on the Israelites. The use of a sorcerer was rather common in Old Testament times. Balak was thinking a curse would weaken the morale of the Israelites so they could be driven away. He even complimented Balaam stating that his curses and blessings were effective. Balaam was well known as a diviner for he lived near the Euphrates River some 400 miles away.



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God Brings Good Where Some Intend Evil
Numbers 22: 31-35
God used Balaam, the pagan diviner, to bring a blessing even as Balak had asked for a curse. The larger scripture of Numbers 22: 7-30 unfolds a most interesting story of the miraculous talking donkey that

saw the angel of the Lord. Representatives of the King of Moab sought Balaam, however he refused to go stating the Lord would not allow him to curse the Israelites as they were blessed. Again more representatives with greater prestige came to Balaam and he refused saying silver and gold would not persuade him to go against the Lord. However, the representatives were invited to stay the night waiting on an answer from God. God allowed Balaam to go but to only say words given by God. The Lord sensed evil in the heart of Balaam and became angry with him. Balaam was traveling on a donkey with two servants when an angel of the

Lord appeared in front of the donkey with his sword drawn. The donkey turned into a field and Balaam struck the donkey. The angel of the Lord appeared twice more in front of the donkey causing Balaam to strike it twice more. The Lord opened the mouth of the donkey causing it to talk asking "What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?" (Numbers 22: 28, NKJV). The Lord caused Balaam's eyes to be opened allowing him to see the angel of the Lord with his sword drawn. Balaam bowed his head and fell to the ground admitting he had sinned and would turn back. However, the angel of the Lord allowed Balaam to go with the representatives of Balak under the condition of speaking only as told of the Lord.

God Never Ceases to Care for His People
Numbers 23: 19-23
God continues to direct Balaam to bless the Israelites even though he was commissioned by King Balak to curse them. Balak exchanges words

with Balaam upon his arrival and shows Balaam the large population of Israelites from the high places of Baal where he sacrifices oxen and sheep. Balaam receives four oracles from the Lord in which he blesses the Israelites. Two truths about God are revealed in the second oracle in verse 19 — God is truth and does not lie and God is and always will be the same. Balaam cannot reverse God's plan for these people referred to as Jacob and Israel. God is the ruler over Israel as is stated in Numbers 23:21 "the shout of a King is among them" (NKJV). God's power is greater than Satan and Balaam was forced to acknowledge God's blessings on His people. God is to be glorified by the success of His people. How glorified is God as a result of our actions? However, God continues to bless us daily. In the words of our lesson title we are to 'stay grateful for God's care.'

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

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Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Christians respond after passing of celebrity atheist

NEW YORK (BP) — Author and speaker Christopher Hitchens, a leader of an aggressive form of unbelief dubbed, "New Atheism," died Thursday from pneumonia, a complication of his esophageal cancer. He was 62.

Hitchens' interests were varied and he wrote extensively about politics, but it was his outspoken, confrontational words on God's existence that caught the attention of the Christian community. Hitchens and other members of the New Atheism movement such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris went beyond the centuries-old arguments against God and religion.

Hitchens wasn't simply arguing against God's existence; he said that the world's greatest problems were caused by religion. Society, he argued, should cleanse itself of all religious beliefs. Hitchens' most famous book on the subject summed up his thoughts in the title, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

He once said of families who raise their children to believe in God: "How can we ever know how many children had their psychological and physical lives irreparably maimed by the compulsory inculcation of faith?"

He wrote that religion was "violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children."

Hitchens, who had dual British and U.S. citizenship, regularly took part in debates over God's existence. For example, in November 2010 he debated Southwestern Seminary professor William Dembski and in April 2009 he sparred with Christian apologist William Lane Craig.

After Hitchens' death, Christian leaders were mostly gracious in their response.

"When my dad died, Chris Hitchens had horrible things to say," Jonathan Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Church in Lynchburg, Va., wrote in a Tweet. "All I can say is that I'm praying for Mr. Hitchens' family in their loss."

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California, said Hitchens was a friend. "I loved & prayed for him constantly & grieve his loss. He knows the Truth now," Warren wrote in a Tweet.



Hitchens

Pastor and author Douglas Wilson, who participated in a series of written debates with Hitchens over God's existence that were put in book form, wrote a tribute to Hitchens at ChristianityToday.com.

"Christopher knew that faithful Christians believe that it is appointed to man once to die, and after that the judgment," Wilson wrote. "He knew that we believe what Jesus taught about the reality of damnation. He also knew that we believe — for I told him — that in this life, the door of repentance is always open."

Hitchens tried to explain away any

potential death-bed conversion, Wilson said. "Christopher was worried about this, and was afraid of letting down the infidel team," Wilson wrote. "In a number of interviews during the course of his cancer treatments, he discussed the prospect of a 'death bed' conversion, and it was clear that he was concerned about the prospect. But, he assured interviewers, if anything like that ever happened, we should all be certain that the cancer or the chemo or something had gotten to his brain."

After Hitchens died, Southern Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. also commented, saying in a Tweet:

"The death tonight of Christopher Hitchens is an excruciating reminder of the consequences of unbelief. We can only pray others will believe. The point about Christopher Hitchens is not that he died of unbelief, but that his unbelief is all that matters now. Unspeakably sad."

Ed Stetzer, vice president of research and ministry development at LifeWay Christian Resources, wrote in a blog post that for many people, "Hitchens' passing will lead to stirring up old debates and old bruises."

Yet Christians should react with compassion, Stetzer said. "I would like to see the dialogue of Christian apologetics move from Hitchens, Dawkins, and Harris into our houses, diners, and local community centers," Stetzer wrote.

"The AP news wire will not be abuzz with the passing of the atheist in your neighborhood, but your heart ought hurt for them. I am grateful for evangelical scholars who have engaged New Atheism with the level of intellectual commitment the movement deserves. But for most of us, we ought to concern ourselves with and grieve over the debates that war in the minds of our families, friends, and coworkers."

"The death tonight of Christopher Hitchens is an excruciating reminder of the consequences of unbelief. We can only pray others will believe. The point about Christopher Hitchens is not that he died of unbelief, but that his unbelief is all that matters now. Unspeakably sad."

— R. Albert Mohler Jr.
president
Southern Seminary

Iran pastor to remain in jail while court considers death sentence

TEHRAN (BP) — An Iranian pastor who potentially faces a death sentence for being a Christian will remain in prison at least four more months and perhaps up to a year, according to conflicting reports.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) reported Dec. 16 that an Iranian court had ordered any decision on pastor Yousef (also spelled Youcef) Nadarkhani to be delayed at least four months, meaning he will be in prison there during Christmas and well into the new year.

Meanwhile, a second organization that monitors religious freedom in the Middle East, known as Present Truth Ministries, reported that the delay would last a year. Either

way, the news was disappointing to Nadarkhani's supporters who had hoped he might be freed by now.

It is not known yet what role Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei played in the decision. Nadarkhani's supporters had been awaiting a decision by the ayatollah and had been expecting it to be handed down in mid-December. The court had requested an "opinion" from the ayatollah.

The goal of keeping him in prison, Present Truth Ministries said, is to "use whatever means necessary to cause him to recant and return to Islam."

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a statement Dec. 9 calling for

Nadarkhani and several other prisoners of conscience worldwide to be released "immediately and unconditionally."

Nadarkhani was sentenced to death a year ago after a court of appeals found him guilty of leaving Islam. The case dates back to 2009 when Nadarkhani was arrested after complaining that his son was being taught Islam in school. He eventually was sentenced to death by the court of appeals.

Earlier this year the Iranian Supreme Court upheld the death sentence but ordered a lower court to examine whether Nadarkhani was ever a Muslim — a fact essential to determine whether he left Islam for Christianity. The lower court in Rasht, Iran,

found that although Nadarkhani was never a practicing Muslim he remained guilty of apostasy because he had Muslim ancestry.

In late September of this year, he was given four chances to recant his faith in court and refused each time. His case then was referred to the ayatollah. The American Center for Law and Justice reported one of his court exchanges.

"Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?" Nadarkhani asked.

"To the religion of your ancestors, Islam," the judge reportedly replied.

"I cannot," the pastor responded.



Nadarkhani